

When God Sets You Up To Fail (And Tells You To Wait)

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"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Tell the people of Israel to turn back and encamp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall encamp facing it, by the sea. For Pharaoh will say of the people of Israel, 'They are wandering in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.' And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD. And they did so.'" (Exodus 14:1-4)

Let's be clear. No military man in his right mind would have obeyed these instructions. Anyone with an I.Q. above that of a leek, a garlic or an onion would have immediately seen that God was instructing them to move into an untenable, even impossible, situation. Their backs would be to the sea and they would be exposed to attack on three sides without any avenue of retreat. Whether viewed from simple common sense or from a military perspective, it was a bad idea. I'm not sure what the ancient Hebrew is for *"I've got a bad feeling about this"*, but I'm sure that more than one Israelite was muttering the Hebrew equivalent under his breath. And it wouldn't be long before Pharaoh would realize the same thing and, with a little "prompting" from God, would choose to attack. All things considered, God had His people exactly where He wanted them. A perfect setup for failure. But why?

Certain spiritual truths are unavoidable, and this is one of them. Some things in our spiritual lives cannot be taught. They must be "caught". They must be the product of raw, personal experience. We need to feel the sea at our backs. We need to feel the ground shake with the approach of chariots and see the dust rise in the distance, signaling that disaster is looming. We need to face the moment of recognition that God in His sovereignty has set us up for a spectacular failure. Not only is there nothing we can do about it, He has pointedly told us to do NOTHING, but wait. But why? The answer is found in the following passage:

"And Moses said to the people, 'Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.'" (Exodus 14:13-14)

God has multiple reasons for everything He does, including leading us into impossible situations that common sense would have told us to avoid in the first place. Perhaps he is teaching us to face our fears so that we can learn to fear nothing but God alone. Perhaps He is teaching us to "stand firm" in our obedience, even when doing so comes at a high personal cost. Perhaps He is teaching us what it means to allow God to fight our battles for us, rather than fighting them ourselves in our own flesh. Perhaps He is teaching us the discipline of "silence" under circumstances that would make others whine and complain. In other words, perhaps He is teaching us to "wait" when every fiber of our being cries out that we should be "doing something".

I recently received a ministry newsletter from an individual who wanted his readers to know that God is "waiting" for the Church to get moving. The time for the Church to "wait on God" was over, and anyone who advocated waiting on God was just plain lazy (!?). Here's my problem with such statements. They simply aren't biblical. A quick review of Scripture will produce numerous (I'm at about 20 and counting) passages which speak of the importance of waiting on God. For example, consider this one from Isaiah, "Therefore the LORD waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the LORD is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him." (Isaiah 30:18). Not only is waiting on God a blessing (as opposed to "laziness"), Scripture specifically warns against failing to wait for God's counsel, *"But they soon forgot his works; they did not wait for his counsel."* (Psalms 106:13) In 1 Samuel 13 Saul lost the Kingdom of Israel because he was unwilling to wait for Samuel in obedience to God's command. His attitude of "I can't wait, I have to do something" revealed his lack of genuine faith and cost him his kingly rule. In contrast, the early Church understood the importance of waiting on God. When they waited on God in Acts 13, by worshiping and fasting, the Holy Spirit spoke with clear and specific instructions, which launched the missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul. Now THAT's good waiting! It is the kind of waiting on God that enables us to shed our agenda and embrace God's agenda.

The people of God in Exodus 14 found themselves in an impossible situation, set up for failure and told to do nothing but be quiet, stand firm and wait. But the situation wasn't really a "set up for failure". Rather, it was a "set up for trust", an opportunity to experience and discover for themselves the holiness of a God Who is absolutely trustworthy, particularly when all hope of human deliverance is gone.

Recently, I was having devotions late one evening, as is my habit. I enjoy spending time with God in the late evening when time is no issue, Gale has gone to bed, the house is quiet and I can be alone with God. Earlier in the day I had been working on our current book project, "The Inextinguishable Blaze" and reflecting on the meaning of God's holiness in our lives. My prayer time was "rudely interrupted" by a voice in my spirit with a clear word: "I am holy. I cannot lie. I have

promised. And I will do it.” It was what I needed to hear at that moment.

The past few months have been “challenging” for us after having stepped out in obedience to close down The Parousia Network and to establish Rising River Media (yes, we’re still pursuing organic house church. We just aren’t trying to organize it). The Lord had told me earlier in the summer that the financial support we had received up to then would soon stop, and it has. He also assured us that new financial resources would be coming that would dwarf anything we had known before now. The promises from His Word were clear. The prophetic input we received from others confirmed what we had heard for ourselves. And the peace we felt in prayer assured us that God is in control and that we are on the right path. But then there were those pesky “Egyptians”. As I share all of this with you now we find ourselves divinely set up for a spectacular failure. Our backs are to the sea, exposed on three sides, the ground is shaking with the rumble of chariots and the dust I see rising on the horizon says trouble is approaching (In the words of an anonymous Israelite, “I’ve got a bad feeling about this”). And it is in the midst of this moment that God has spoken clearly to us: “I am holy. I cannot lie. I have promised. And I will do it.”

Most American Christians are too busy delivering themselves to allow God to deliver them. Or they’re getting a serious arm cramp from patting themselves on the back and saying, “I would never have allowed myself to get into that situation in the first place.” Here’s the problem. You cannot learn the holiness of God and His faithfulness to His promises if you are unwilling to allow Him to lead you into impossible situations where the only two choices are between God’s faithfulness or your own demise. “I am holy. I cannot lie. I have promised. And I will do it.” This is a declaration about Who God is. If it is not true and cannot be trusted, then we - you and I - are fools who deserve to perish at the hands of the Egyptians . . . just for being stupid.

Finally, I am very much aware that many of you on this newsletter list now find yourselves in similar places in your spiritual experience. Gale and I are very much aware of our own calling as “spectacles” to the body on certain matters of walking and living by faith. In the words of the Apostle Paul, our goal is to comfort you with the same comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God (2 Corinthians 1:4). We don’t know what the “Egyptians” are in your life which have backed you up against the sea with no hope of human deliverance. But know this. God says to you, “I am holy. I cannot lie. I have promised. And I will do it.” Let’s make plans now to meet on the other side of the sea and share stories of how God parted the waters, brought us through and kept His promise: “the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again.”